



FEMA



**Personal Preparedness in America:
Findings from the Citizen Corps Survey of Four Urban Areas
June 2009
- Summary Sheet -**

Purpose of Survey: To evaluate four urban areas's progress on personal preparedness and to measure the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relative to preparing for a range of hazards.

Research Conducted by: FEMA's Community Preparedness Division and Citizen Corps

Sampling: 2,000 respondents from four urban areas: New York, Houston, San Francisco, Indianapolis (500 respondents in each area)

Research Questions:

- To what extent are individuals prepared for disasters? What barriers do individuals perceive in preparing for disasters?
- What is the perception of vulnerability to different types of disasters? How do people perceive the utility of preparedness?
- In which stage of the Stages of Change Model (Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance) are individuals relative to disaster preparedness?
- How does disaster preparedness differ for individuals with disabilities?
- What is the perceived social responsibility for reporting suspicious behavior?
- How aware are individuals of specific Federally-sponsored community preparedness programs, and what are their communication preferences about these programs?

Key Findings by Urban Area:

NEW YORK

- 50% of respondents have supplies set aside at home, 23% have supplies in their car, 37% have supplies in their workplace
- 32% of respondents have a household disaster plan
- 26% of respondents knew about local alerts and warnings systems, 26% knew of local official sources of public safety information, and 22% knew about how to get help with evacuation or getting to a shelter
- 42% of respondents said their belief that emergency responders will help them was a primary barrier to getting prepared
- 62% of respondents expect to need help evacuating in the event of an emergency
- 36% of respondents felt confident in their ability to respond to a sudden natural disaster in the first 5 minutes, while only 15% felt confident responding to the release of a chemical agent
- 64% of respondents expect to rely on household members and 72% expect to rely on fire, police and emergency personnel during the first 72 hours of a disaster
- 38% of respondents thought an act of terrorism was likely to ever happen in their community compared to a severe disease outbreak (24%) or a natural disaster (30%)
- 28% of respondents are not planning to do anything about preparing, 24% intend to prepare in the next 6 months and 23% have been prepared for at least the last 6 months

HOUSTON

- 65% of respondents have supplies set aside at home, 24% have supplies in their car, 46% have supplies in their workplace
- 52% of respondents have a household disaster plan
- 52% of respondents knew about local evacuation routes, and 29% knew about local shelter locations
- 47% of respondents said their belief that emergency responders will help them was a primary barrier to getting prepared
- 42% of respondents expect to need help evacuating in the event of an emergency
- 56% of respondents felt confident in their ability to respond to a sudden natural disaster in the first 5 minutes, while only 19% felt confident responding to an explosion of a radiological or dirty bomb
- 72% of respondents expect to rely on household members and 61% expect to rely on fire, police and emergency personnel during the first 72 hours of a disaster
- 52% of respondents thought a natural disaster was likely to ever happen in their community compared to a severe disease outbreak (18%)
- 39% of respondents have been prepared for at least the past 6 months, while 15% are not planning to do anything about preparing

SAN FRANCISCO

- 60% of respondents have supplies set aside at home, 30% have supplies in their car, 51% have supplies in their workplace
- 36% of respondents have a household disaster plan
- 30% respondents knew about local alerts and warnings systems and 13% knew local evacuation routes (13%)
- 40% of respondents said their belief that emergency responders will help them was a primary barrier to getting prepared
- 49% of respondents expect to need help evacuating in the event of an emergency
- 60% of respondents felt confident in their ability to respond to a sudden natural disaster in the first 5 minutes, while only 19% felt confident responding to an explosion of a radiological or dirty bomb
- 71% of respondents expect to rely on household members and 54% expect to rely on fire, police and emergency personnel during the first 72 hours of a disaster
- 59% of respondents thought a natural disaster was likely to ever happen in their community compared to an act of terrorism (16%)
- 42% of respondents have been prepared for at least the past 6 months, while 13% are not planning to do anything about preparing

INDIANAPOLIS

- 52% of respondents have supplies set aside at home, 31% have supplies in their car, 47% have supplies in their workplace
- 42% of respondents have a household disaster plan
- 59% of respondents knew about local alerts and warnings systems and 17% knew local evacuation routes (17%)
- 38% of respondents said their belief that emergency responders will help them was a primary barrier to getting prepared
- 44% of respondents expect to need help evacuating in the event of an emergency
- 62% of respondents felt confident in their ability to respond to a sudden natural disaster in the first 5 minutes, while only 20% felt confident responding to an explosion of a radiological or dirty bomb
- 69% of respondents expect to rely on household members and 62% expect to rely on fire, police and emergency personnel during the first 72 hours of a disaster

- 38% of respondents thought a natural disaster was likely to ever happen in their community compared to a severe disease outbreak (18%)
- 27% of respondents are not planning to do anything about preparing, 26% have been prepared for at least the last 6 months, 20% intend to prepare in the next 6 months

Summary and Recommendations: The following recommendations highlight differences in personal preparedness and civic engagement among the four surveyed areas. These findings and recommendations are intended to be reviewed in conjunction with *Personal Preparedness in America: Findings from the Citizen Corps National Survey*. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to use these recommendations in their efforts to increase community resilience.

- Individuals generally did not feel that disasters of any type were likely to occur in their communities. There were, however, noteworthy differences among the four urban areas surveyed by type of hazard. The public should have a baseline understanding of how to respond to any hazard, but should be specifically trained in response skills and preparedness measures for the hazards most likely to occur in their communities.
- Many individuals did not believe that preparing for terrorist attacks would make a difference in an actual event. Preparedness and response education must contain messages about response efficacy for the recommended actions for each hazard. A particular emphasis on response efficacy is needed for hazards that are less understood by the public (hazardous materials accidents, severe disease outbreaks, and terrorist attacks).
- Many individuals lacked confidence in their abilities to know what to do in the first few minutes of different types of disasters. Communication and outreach strategies should educate individuals about specific response skills needed for natural hazards most likely to occur in their communities and include a particular emphasis on less understood hazards, such as an explosion, chemical release, or dirty bomb.
- While individuals in all the urban areas had similar perceived impediments to preparedness, important differences need to be taken into account when planning local communication and outreach activities. Realistic expectations of emergency response capabilities must be communicated.
- Expectations of reliance on non-profit organizations and faith communities differed by urban area. Organizations that the public expects to rely on in a disaster must be integrated into the community's emergency planning, training and exercises. Understanding the extent to which their constituencies will look to them for help in a disaster may encourage these organizations to take a stronger role in community preparedness.
- Residents in the four surveyed urban areas who perceived they were more vulnerable to a natural disaster were more likely to have disaster supplies set aside in their homes than respondents nationwide, but the specific supplies were still inadequate. Greater efforts must be made to help individuals understand the reasons for stocking supplies beyond food and water, such as radios, flashlights, batteries, first aid kits, and personal documents, and the need to have supplies in multiple locations.
- Important differences existed among the urban areas surveyed regarding having a household emergency plan. In addition, individuals who reported being prepared often lacked a household plan. Communications efforts should explain the importance of having a household plan, the components of a plan, and the need to discuss and practice the plan.
- Most individuals in the four surveyed urban areas did not know where to find official sources of information in the event of a disaster and were not familiar with local alerts and warnings, evacuation routes, and shelter locations. Greater education on community plans and resources is needed.

- Participation in preparedness drills/exercises was insufficient. Prior practice is crucial for effective execution. Drills are needed in the workplace, in schools, and at home, and should be integrated into social networks.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

- The differences revealed by surveying specific urban areas demonstrate the importance of understanding the unique attributes of each community. While national statistics are useful to capture trends over time and to have an assessment of national attitudes and perceptions, it is clear that there are important geographical differences with respect to community preparedness and self-sufficiency.
- Research at the local or regional level is needed to provide an understanding of the attitudes, behaviors, and needs of community members to develop better, more targeted outreach and educational efforts and to set priorities.
- Research on specific actions such as understanding evacuation routes or shelter locations can provide critical insight for government officials to work with community organizations and the public to improve planning and communication. Furthermore, surveys targeted to local populations can test actual knowledge of local plans and protocols at a more specific level than a national survey.
- Both the national findings and the urban area findings from this research demonstrate that effective strategies for community preparedness must couple national leadership with effective implementation at the community level through social networks.
- Since September 11, 2001, DHS and FEMA national policy and guidelines have recognized the importance of government collaboration with non-government sectors and the importance of supporting grassroots efforts such as Citizen Corps. State and local governments have also embraced this strategy. While there has been significant progress, we must continue to adapt and improve our outreach, education, training, and exercises to achieve a true culture of preparedness where everyone in America is an active participant.